

Manifestations of Microfascism in Spatial Dimensions: A Study on Mumbai's Public Spaces

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ABSTRACT Mumbai has an identity that is built around its multicultural, multi-ethnic population, with an enterprising community that prides itself on its resilient spirit. The pluralism that marks the city's social spaces remained powerful for decades resulting in an immigrant population from all over the country finding its home in this city. When Bombay was renamed Mumbai, it was also a reflection of the altered social sensibilities and the manifestation of an exclusionary politics which began to get reflected in the public spaces of Mumbai. Post globalization and economic liberalization, a hegemonic shift in power centers brought about further negotiations with identities and social spaces, with the new cityscape evolving steadily. The pervasive presence of the politics of othering that marks the contemporary Indian political sphere has its presence felt in Mumbai's public spaces. The rapid gentrification and erasure of the poor from the public spaces, the expanding privately-owned public spaces and the social interactions that mark the new global city of Mumbai unfold the hegemonic power relations of the new India. This article attempts to imagine the new social narratives and cartographies within the theoretical framework of microfascism as elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari. Mumbai's public spaces are closely observed and analyzed to comprehend the new dynamics of power at work and its political and social ramifications in relation to the rest of the nation. This paper also seeks to look at the patterns of dissent evolving out of the microfascist spaces of Mumbai.

KEYWORDS fascism, globalization, neoliberalism, public space

Introduction

Urban India rose in prominence in the neoliberal age, post globalization, with a major shift in the economic sector, a shift that has resulted in an agrarian crisis and the large-scale migration of people from rural to urban areas. With this paradigm shift in spatial dimensions, urban spaces have begun to determine and define the socio-political and cultural identity of the nation. Mumbai as an urban space, with its dynamic power hierarchies and complex narratives of social relationships, reveals the violence of postmodern, post-Fordist societies in multiple ways. Public spaces, with their iconographies, random interpersonal interactions, and cartographies that reflect shifting social powers, are ideal sites for evaluation and research in order to trace the growth and evolution of power hierarchies in contemporary India.

Mumbai as an urban space is a multicultural city that has celebrated plurality for centuries. Its spatial identity is marked by a population with great ethnic, religious, and racial diversity. As a city that hosts millions, its dynamic cultural heterogeneity has helped it thrive even during times of national crises. Mumbai's public spaces have been chaotic, like

any other postcolonial city, yet they have retained their identities by cherishing the iconography and cultural tropes distinctly unique to the city. The cultural history engraved into public spaces remains cherished by the people, a largely migrant population that learned to adapt to the rigors of living in this densely populated city. Mumbai's public spaces began to see a major transformation post globalization. With neoliberalism seeping into the social fabric of India, values changed; Mumbai's streets, and the nature of social interactions also were altered significantly. As the country opened up to global markets and as communication networks radically altered the practices of social communication, a frantic attempt at homogenization began as a counter current. The emergent hegemonic identity is one that is molded around ethno-religious discourses, emphasizes nationalism, and is shaped by a militant Hindu self; this threatens to marginalize and exclude other identities in the process. There have been movements and people's marches to resist this growing influence of the "political Hindu," and the manner in which they conduct their acts of dissent illuminates attendant paradigm shifts in Indian social structures.

Mumbai and Control Societies

The Mumbai of contemporary times is a city which thrives through its plurality, yet closely guards the politics of exclusion that has found favor in an increasingly polarizing Indian society. Technological advancements have enabled this change to materialize effectively. The identity of this new city space appears to have been initiated and perpetuated by the ubiquitous presence of certain features that define control societies, as delineated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In societies of control, a concept put forth by Deleuze, there is a pervasive power that modulates subjectivities and behaviors in open, fluid networks. People operate autonomously but are modulated or controlled constantly. Control societies, according to Deleuze are actively involved in the production of subjectivity, developing technological and social protocols, as well as laws and norms and governance.¹ Crime, violence, and surveillance are clubbed together with the presence of surveillance methods like mobile tracking, biometric systems, and closed circuit cameras justified by the fear and insecurity that has been inculcated in the minds of the citizens. As Deleuze and Guattari observe: "the administration of a great organized molar security has as its correlate a whole micro-management of petty fears, a permanent molecular insecurity, . . . that the motto of domestic policymakers might be: a macropolitics of society by and for a micropolitics of insecurity."² The fear carefully nurtured at the micropolitical level, the molecular level, helps create schisms in the social structure. The politics of exclusion supports this. For example, the Post-Babri riots of 1992³ aided in creating a discourse of fear structured around the concept of a "nation at risk."⁴ "Private fortified spaces"⁵ became the panacea, a solution that could provide greater security from perceived rather than real dangers, which have always been social constructs. The "proliferation of new technologies of surveillance"⁶ in privately-owned public spaces helped to consolidate the identity of the city, an integral component of the control societies of the new millennium. The innumerable cameras and the surveillance intended to create a safe city has instead created a city that is constantly observed: people constantly on camera, being watched continuously, feeding on the neurotic fear that has been infesting the minds of the masses. While the population plays into the hands of hegemonic power hierarchies desiring repression and control, the dynamics of this power play has been elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari.

Deleuze delineates three kinds of power namely, sovereign power, disciplinary power, and control of communication; the third has emerged as an effective tool for domination. In India, as in other parts of the world, communication networks have an alarmingly huge and overwhelming hegemony.⁷ This hegemonic power that is designed to control is constantly employed to subjugate bodies and control citizens. The networks and webs that regulate the social system are increasingly being used to discipline societies and subjugate the masses. Panopticons are omnipresent in societies that are increasingly turning heterotopic. Control societies thus build social structures that reflect the overcoded machines of capitalist regimes. But the character of control societies does not resemble the fascist regimes that we are familiar with. Fascism as we have encountered in history is far less intrusive, compared to the concept of microfascism as put forth by Deleuze and Guattari. In this new social system, corporate powers are entitled to enjoy their privileges while the poor are exposed to unregulated market forces. The poor, presumed innately criminal, are constantly under heavy surveillance, and an incessant campaign to indoctrinate the masses forms an integral part of governance. In this social environment capitalism assumes total power “to intensively shape and homogenize desires and forms of life especially under the appearance of difference, choices, and freedom” thus resulting in “the destruction of all signs of historical unevenness.”⁸ This declining interest in historicity creates a social order that is destructive to the core. “A postmodern, one-dimensional, or administered society is defined perhaps above all by this waning of historicity—which may of course be accompanied by the proliferation of its instrumentalised simulacra.”⁹ Destroying historicity and creating utopias out of nostalgia for a mythical past, and thriving on the affect generated by nostalgia for moments from the past, rules the collective psyche of this fascist society.

Microfascism

Deleuze and Guattari elaborated upon the concept of microfascism, which functions at the molecular level and ought to be placed in the context of subjectivity that is “plural and polyphonic.”¹⁰ New subjectivities can be the “crystallisation of an immense collective desire”¹¹ for “emancipation along with a retrogressive, conservative even fascist . . . drives of a nationalistic, ethnic and religious nature.”¹² Mumbai’s public spaces transformed radically in recent times, and Hindu festivals in these times reflect these shifting priorities. Mumbai has the unique distinction of being the city that celebrates *Ganeshotsav*, a festival dedicated to Lord Ganesha. This festival occupies public spaces and transforms them to sacred spaces during the duration of ten days, every year. This festival, formerly restricted to homes and temples, became a public spectacle during the struggle for independence. Leaders aiming for a greater sense of community instilled a sense of nationalism through the festival in order to ensure significant participation. Later the festival grew in prominence, along with forces of Hindutva, gaining control over the majority Hindu population. In contemporary Mumbai, *Ganeshotsav* is a festival that significantly displays the strength of Hindutva forces, where streets are transformed by a saffron hue and public spaces are invaded by loud and aggressive festival participants who silence every single voice of dissent. A large number of pandals, opulent and highly visible temporary venues, signal the shift in the nation away from an identity as pluralistic and secular. This refusal to accommodate and accept plurality and diversity in matters of faith reflects a shift at the molecular level, both in individuals as well as in the social structures that define the nation.

Guattari further spoke of subjectivity in the context of microfascism as “conservative reterritorialisations of subjectivity.”¹³ Sometimes subjectivity is individualized, sometimes it is collective, as a multiplicity governed by the logic of affects.¹⁴ There is a “relatively progressive mutation of subjectivity”¹⁵ that is continually happening at the molecular level. It is changing the way life exists in neighborhood, schools and other institutions.¹⁶ In the production of subjectivity several things are relevant, including religion, myth, and mass media.¹⁷ Mumbai, and every other part of India, has been witnessing this struggle to build homogeneity in subjectivities through the ethno-religious identity of Hindutva. The bureaucratic systems act accordingly and try to “miniaturize their repressive machines.”¹⁸ Macropolitics draws from the “small interpersonal dealings with one another,”¹⁹ “the molecular[, which] works in detail and operates in small groups.”²⁰ The manner in which right wing organizations like the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak (commonly known as RSS) work in India illustrates the nature of the functioning of this political structure. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh conducts residential workshops molding individuals’ behavior patterns, normalizing the ideology of right wing extremism and integrating it into regular life choices. Since “one’s sense of personal identity is itself a product of desire related to a broader social structure,” the Hindu right wing flourishes, emerging as a monolithic presence through its negotiations at the molecular level within Indian society.²¹

Hence every act is political and every political act has two dimensions, micropolitical and macropolitical. “There is a micropolitics of perception, affection, conversation, and so forth. If we consider the great binary aggregates, such as the sexes or classes, it is evident that they also cross over into molecular assemblages of a different nature, and that there is a double reciprocal dependency between them.”²² Microfascism dominates the molecular assemblages, attenuating principles of democracy and free will. “Fascism is inseparable from a proliferation of molecular focuses in interaction”²³ and “every fascism is defined by a micro-black hole that stands on its own and communicates with the others, before resonating in a great, generalized central black hole. There is fascism when a war machine is installed in each hole, in every niche.”²⁴ While this might be a diffused presence in the social structures, such as a “band, gang, sect, family, town, neighbourhood, [or] vehicle,” there is a concomitant presence in the molar structures as well.²⁵ A precise understanding of these molecular power centers unravels the features of microfascism and its increasing significance in control societies. Deleuze and Guattari talks about these powers as that of the state, heavily coded into molecular structures of power “by the abstract machine of mutation, flows, and quanta.”²⁶

There is “always a proportional relation between the two” molar and molecular, “directly or inversely proportional.”²⁷ With a strong molar organization there is a strong tendency to induce “a molecularization of its own elements, relations, and elementary apparatuses,” forming micro-assemblages.²⁸ Though there are always elements that escape the overcoding machine, and people who see with clarity and remain voices of dissent, they remain marginalized while fascism reigns at both the molar and the molecular level. Mumbai’s urban spaces are locales for acts of dissent in various ways, infiltrating into molecular levels, resulting in deterritorialization, as in the case of the “Why Loiter Movement.” The movement emerged in Mumbai as an expression of dissent where public spaces were reclaimed by women and queer communities. The movement was initiated by Shilpa Phadke, Shilpa Ranade, and Sameera Khan, and became powerful as a resistance against the misogyny of a patriarchal society.²⁹

Mumbai's Public Spaces and Microfascist Tendencies

"Since the end of cold war most countries have been moving in one direction: more policing, more surveillance, more militarism, more xenophobia, more corporatism" and less democracy, along with the "emerging prominence of right-wing populism."³⁰ With political parties losing their credibility among the masses, there is an increasing politicization of ethno-religious groups that are formed to achieve particular spatial and temporal goals. These right-wing, aggressive, masculine political narratives demand new iconography in order to create historical narratives in opposition to the fading interest in historicity. This aspect is clearly visible in the humongous proportions of the statues being installed in city spaces. Mumbai is scheduled to build a statue of Shivaji, a legendary Maratha king, which will be 219 m height, and when completed will be the tallest in the world. It is to be built in the sea off the Mumbai coast and is expected to cost around 36 billion to 40 billion Rupees.³¹ Mumbai has a tradition carved in the narratives of iconic landmarks which is gradually being erased in favor of hegemonic iconography, and hegemonic political powers.

Mumbai's public spaces have undergone major transformation over the years and globalization plays a significant role in this new spatial identity. While an aggressive nationalistic political discourse has emerged in recent years, a simultaneous growth in neoliberal values has also happened which is reflected in city spaces. Corporate India's pervasive presence is visible through the metro railway, with its air conditioned compartments and sanitized spaces along with the advertisements splashed across these trains that form an integral part of the metro experience. Disciplined lines of commuters and the relative silence in the compartments (compared to the noise and chaos in the local train service that runs parallel to this) are also part of this neoliberal air.

Assemblages of control are easily incorporated into Mumbai's social spaces since microfascist tendencies find favor among the people of Mumbai, as in every other city in India. With globalization and the influx of neoliberal values, there is the distinct shift in perceptions of the middle class Indian, conditioned by desire as defined by capitalist forces. Mumbai's urban spaces are well known for high population density and the complex problems related to the homeless millions living on the streets. Yet the city is increasingly gentrified and this process foregrounds how elements of microfascism create increasingly exclusive spaces.

There is an invasion of the middle class in poor neighborhoods. One of the methods by which gentrification is accelerated is through street art, establishing order amidst the chaos of a hugely populated city. Street artists like Tyler, Jas Chiranjeeva, Wicked Broz and others have been transforming the city's public spaces, creating aesthetically appealing streets and transforming slums with bright colored paints and roofing materials.³² In this incessant "cultural re-appropriation of public spaces,"³³ we witness the patterns of microfascism that have been invading the sensibilities of the citizens, at the molecular levels of manifestation in social spaces. Street art is employed by the State and corporations to spread messages and thereby encourage gentrification. According to a report by Singh, *Swacch Bharat* campaign, a central government's initiative, is propagated through street art where government and Viacom18 join hands to campaign *Chakachak Mumbai*.³⁴ Public spaces in Mumbai see a rapid and rampant gentrification process, with

rules and regulations constantly excluding the poor, be it street vendors, or fish markets, by "citing environmental and sanitation problems."³⁵

The "politics of forgetting is embodied in the emergence of a normative civic culture that is based on the construction of a form of consumer-citizenship"³⁶ where the state is reduced in stature, and civil rights in the city are largely curtailed. One example is the "restructuring [of] parks and *maidans* (play grounds) to jogging parks."³⁷ One can also recall the "seven gates constructed for Shivaji Park as part of a beautification project," which thereby restricted park entry.³⁸ These urban spaces demonstrate the concentration of wealth (gentrification) and the concentration of poverty (ghettoisation).³⁹ The city also witnesses a shrinkage in its public spaces citing urban development, resulting in fewer spaces for expressions of protest and resistance. Public spaces like parks are gradually barricaded or walled, with entry restricted in various ways. Human beings are no longer capable of mapping territories, they are made docile through their desires to create rules and repress. Malls and similar privately owned public spaces are another example in this context. These increasingly-walled spaces are sites where the cruelty of exclusionary politics borders on fascist tendencies. Microfascism that thrives in Mumbai represents the unique nature of the control that structures the social relationships and identities in contemporary India. The assemblages so shaped by microfascism are constructed around the intersections of class, caste, and gender, as well as the religious identities of city dwellers. The ghettoization of Muslim communities in Mumbai that began after the riots in the 1990s should be viewed in this perspective. As seen in control societies, populations and their spatial rights become crucial in the context of biopolitics. Gentrification of Mumbai's spaces through rapidly eliminating the poor, converting slums into middle class apartment complexes, and expanding privatization of public spaces can all be cited here. "Spatial purification as an integral part of the middle-class-based political culture of liberalizing India" and is still an ongoing process.⁴⁰

A tenth of Mumbai's population are pavement dwellers,⁴¹ yet they are systematically being rendered invisible by a process where "mainstream national political discourses increasingly depict the middle classes as the representative citizens of liberalizing India."⁴² This process of exclusion is not confined to rendering the lives of these people precarious, but also marks them as part of marginalized social groups who are rendered invisible within the dominant culture. Since "social relations always have a spatial form and spatial content,"⁴³ this "politics of purification"⁴⁴ becomes a political project where spatial boundaries are employed effectively to create and sustain socially exclusive classes of the urban population. Along with this, there is a "proliferation of new repressions in space and movement," a "security-obsessed urbanism" that perpetuates an "ecology of fear."⁴⁵ In these "pseudo-public space[s]—sumptuary malls, office centers, culture acropolises we encounter numerous invisible signs warning off the underclass 'Other'."⁴⁶ These spaces clearly illustrate the aspect of microfascism that makes it ominous. "It's too easy to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective."⁴⁷

Capitalism and Desire in Microfascist Societies

These new urban spaces symbolize the paradigm shifts that define the new India. Post globalization and economic liberalization, the nation witnessed a wholehearted acceptance of neoliberal values, thus creating an urban-centered individualistic society.

While defining features of microfascism, Deleuze and Guattari wrote of capitalism and its role in creating microfascism in the social structures of postmodern societies: "What sets fascism in motion yesterday continues to proliferate in other forms, within the complex of contemporary social space."⁴⁸ As Rosi Braidotti says, "We need to engage with the capitalism and schizophrenia that is inside all of us, not just out there, but inside formatting us."⁴⁹

Capitalism creates an atmosphere where the human as desiring machine emerges as a key player, and where desire, which is integrally linked to microfascism, arises as a potential force shaping the destiny of the nation.

Capitalist totalitarian machines manage to divide, particularize, and molecularize the workers, meanwhile tapping their potentiality for desire. These machines infiltrate . . . [and] install themselves at the very heart of the workers' subjectivity and vision of the world. Its goal is to have automatic systems of regulation at its command. This regulatory role is given to the State and to the mechanisms of contractualization between the "social partners."⁵⁰

Desire, in capitalist societies, structures the milieu, frames rules, and structures behavior patterns. Desire is embedded in a social field, hence the habit of forming habits has an inherent micropolitics that shapes and conditions human behavior.⁵¹ People thus become a multiplicity of desiring machines, inseparable from all complex assemblages. Guattari envisages desire to be of prime importance in the context of reading microfascism and these desires are designed and perpetuated by the capitalist regimes. "Capitalist relations of production . . . shape a certain type of producer-consumer individual. The molecularization of the processes of repression, and by extension, this prospect of a micropolitics of desire, are . . . linked to a transformation of material processes, to a deterritorialization of all forms of production, whether it involves a social production or a desiring-production."⁵²

Microfascism and Personal Choices

When desire structures a social milieu that has shaped itself through social relationships, and the social milieu is one that demands microfascist tendencies, then desire desires such repressions, leading the state into a repressive social structure. The individuals themselves express these tendencies in their daily interactions with others as well as the society as a whole. Behavioral patterns are structured around the social norms that are produced by the numerous desiring machines that create the social system. These processes are intensely political, since "there is ultimately nothing that is not political, because desire is always embedded to a broader social field."⁵³

The semiotics of microfascism is most visible in social interactions in public spaces, highlighted by the intolerance that arises in individual civic behavior. High rise apartments have sign boards outside the gates that arrogantly proclaim they will deflate the tires of non-resident cars parked inside the apartment complex. Residential societies of upper middle-class communities vividly reflect microfascist thinking patterns. Their interactions and negotiations define powered relationships spatially. "Emphasizing embodiment allows us to identify and underscore the important element of human agency in both the physical construction as well as the social production of place."⁵⁴ Mumbai's urban spaces are

chaotic, with often bizarre levels of heavy traffic, as well as hawkers and busy pedestrians walking at an extremely fast pace. Yet there exists parallel to this another city space, with its disciplined work force employed in sanitized spaces and with an intense desire for the subjugation of order and discipline enforced from within the structure. Individual beings with the power and agency to imagine these spaces are driven by these desires that are in acquiescence with the capitalist system.

Spatial identities are designed by individuals who form the urban population, and the political dimensions of these acts reveal power hierarchies that structure a society. The semiotics of spaces thus speak of the desires that rule embodied selves. "What I call semiotization is what happens with perception, with movement in space, . . . everything that concerns the body. All these modes of semiotization are being reduced to the dominant language, the language of power which coordinated its syntactic regulation with speech production in its totality."⁵⁵ Thus "capitalism cannot successfully put together its work force unless it proceeds through a series of semiotic subjugations."⁵⁶ This semiotic subjugation is a rule paramount to the capitalist system as it infiltrates into the social sensibilities of any nation.

Capitalist structures thus function by offering a multiplicity of choices, and the illusory freedom to choose creates a flood of desire. But desire within these structures, with their flows blocked and segmented, causes overcoding, resulting in subjugation and self-destruction of the assemblages thus created. Urban spaces constantly witness this process in action where campaigns and programs are held and participation is ensured "through identification with the values that [it] represents."⁵⁷ This "volunteered labor"⁵⁸ forms a part of the civic culture. In Mumbai, volunteer groups of civilians participate eagerly to clean trash, assuming individual responsibility. "Volunteerism does not subvert the capitalist order, it only makes us more beholden to its power."⁵⁹ Civic responsibility has its lines of duty blurred with regards to such philanthropic activities and city administration, along with media, hails these activities. This volunteering work is conducted by organizations that are seemingly democratic, open, and free, but which have a top-down organization.⁶⁰ Hence "the elision between empowerment and enslavement is only known after it is passed."⁶¹ This is especially true of a younger generation who grew up in this new sensibility and fails to realize the oppressive nature of such structures.

[citation needed]

In Mumbai, as in other parts of the world, microfascism succeeds in building an environment of fear and hatred, and a culture of silence permeates the social spheres. "In recent years political movements have emerged in Mumbai supporting pureness of identity based on specific regional, linguistic and caste factors. These movements have triggered a 'de-cosmopolitising' process that highlights the increasing value placed on ethnicity."⁶² Mumbai's cosmopolitanism is a much treasured feature and its legacy of a plurality of cultural identities cannot be disputed. The enormous proportion of immigrant population in Mumbai has created a heterogeneity that thrived for years since independence. "The point therefore is not so much to make an inventory of the "ethnic" traits of the various components of Mumbai's metropolitan universe, but rather to direct the topic to two aspects . . . : ethno-historical imagination and bio-political governance."⁶³ Salman Rushdie, while analyzing the change in its name from Bombay to Mumbai, also said that Bombay "rejoices in mongrelisation, [and] fears the absolutism of the Pure" and represents the new that penetrates the world, while in Mumbai the reality of "mixed tradition is replaced by the fantasy of purity."⁶⁴ This renaming of the city reflects an epistemic shift described by Jim Masselos as the outcome of a "polarization of attitudes among

communal lines.”⁶⁵ The altered reality of Mumbai has seen its impact in the polarization and ghettoization of public spaces that defines the city in the new millennium. “The widespread solidarities were replaced by particularist affiliations and a progressive social and political ethnicisation, whose potential for disruption was revealed (when instances of) daily social conflict escalated into extended collective violence.”⁶⁶ The city’s responses to these instances of violence have resulted in greater social distancing between communities.

To further comprehend the processes and character of microfascism in the context of Mumbai, particular events ought to be reviewed in this perspective. The farmers’ protest march that happened in Mumbai in 2018 is an ideal moment in this analysis. Mumbai witnessed two protest marches in the year 2018. The Kisan March was organized largely by the leftist organizations and was a 180 km walk from Nasik, for seven days, which ended in Mumbai. The city witnessed a peaceful protest march which had about 40,000 farmers participating in it.⁶⁷ The second one was the Dalit protest march, which saw sporadic violence. Both the protests demanded justice: the first demanded government action to the agrarian crisis, and the other protested against violence against the Dalit community. The Dalit march, in complete contrast to the farmers’ march, was denounced by the media as a violent and destructive one, while its objectives were arrogantly ignored by the state, and brutally suppressed. The leaders were hunted down and arrested, with very little popular support for the cause or the community. While the Dalit march was disruptive as protest often is, the other conformed to the urban propriety, cautiously proceeding to prevent any disturbance to the capitalist work culture. The reaction to these protests were radically different, both from the media and from the urban population. Dalit representation in Indian newsrooms is minimal even in 2018, and as a result, the coverage either lacks empathy, as in the case of the headlines today, or the reporting is either sensational or perfunctory.⁶⁸ Hence the Dalit march remained as a subversive act challenging the hegemony, while the farmers’ march found acceptance. This acceptance is a paradoxical one, since a similar act of protest by farmers in New Delhi failed to find sympathizers both among the media and the masses. “Unlike their counterparts in Maharashtra, their (Farmers from Tamil Nadu who protested in New Delhi) protest tactics, which included the brandishing of skulls, the consumption of faeces, and stripping, might have proved too ‘unpalatable’ to the public.”⁶⁹ Urban spaces that were microfascist at the molecular level responded to the protests in ways that corroborate the concepts put forth by Deleuze and Guattari. “The fascism Deleuze and Guattari are talking about is not some innate disease or pathology that we can’t shake, but rather a perversion of desire produced through forms of life under capitalism and modernity: practices of authoritarianism and domination and exploitation that form us, such that we can’t just “decide” our way out of them.”⁷⁰

Kisan March perfectly demonstrated the power of the social media spaces and the postmodern reality that is imagined and narrated through a network aimed at shaping public discourses. Updates were posted continuously through hashtags on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms. “Images of the march at night went viral on social media on March 11th. This achieved the holy grail from a public relations standpoint—it made a protest against the government look beautiful.”⁷¹ #kisanlongmarch became a viral news item on all social media spaces. Mumbai citizens showered flowers on the protesters, offered them food, footwear, water, and even donations in the form of money. “With their well-oiled public relations machine and sponsorship by a national farmers union, the Maharashtra farmers were able to wrest public support and effectively demonstrate the importance of their cause.”⁷² Media responses were sympathetic and

aimed at communicating with the people of Mumbai, addressing the normative patterns and desires of the capitalist social imagination. On March 12th, the *Indian Express* ran a front page report on the march and included interviews with 10 participating farmers on the problems they were facing. *Scroll* conducted Facebook Live conversations with farmers and *Mid-Day* ran a front-page headline that read, "Mumbaikars Welcome Farmers With Open Arms." In a piece for *The Wire*, Ayush Dubey, a young journalist, wrote of his experience as a participant in the march, stating "this is a real protest by a sad farmer community. They are working hard for their demands."⁷³ Attention was also drawn to the severity of their conditions, epitomized by their bleeding, blistered feet—a sign of dignified, non-violent desperation.⁷⁴ Celebrities as well as common people expressed their solidarity to the cause. "Industrialist Anand Mahindra tweeted: 'Mondays are a time to share quotes about motivation to get to work. Over 35K farmers have walked for days to get to Mumbai. We Mumbaikars are fed by them. . . . Seeing the elderly amongst them with calloused feet, I cannot preach about motivation. Their determination is enough of an example.'⁷⁵ Sympathy and solidarity for the march reflected the altered reality of social existence, where disruptions were no longer welcomed even as a sign of protest.

The protest march and the manner in which it was conducted encapsulates the norms and values of neoliberal capitalist structures perfectly. The unobtrusive presence of the protesters in the city space and their absolute obeisance to the capitalist way of existence seem to be the highlight of this march. While the political leadership refused to relent till the last day of the march, the rest of the city expressed their sympathies wholeheartedly. "Apprehensions that the traffic of the city will be thrown out of gear creating much inconvenience to commuters, including examinees, were put to rest as the protesters walked on Sunday night to reach Azad Maidan early in the morning, before the rush starts. No traffic diversions were reported."⁷⁶ As Sainath reviewed the situation: "Mumbai responded to the marching farmers . . . (by offering) packets of food and water. These acts of sympathy and solidarity stood out in sharp relief against the callousness of India's governments and elites to the deepening rural distress. . . . India's corporate-controlled television networks and newspapers, which mostly ignore the poor, scrambled to respond to the dignified protesters."⁷⁷ While the sympathy and the solidarity remains appreciable, the assemblages of microfascist desires that generate these gestures of compassion ought to be studied.

There is a violence in our society which creates inequality, a systemic violence that breeds microfascist desires, and the streets of Mumbai represent these traits. The large number of homeless population and the stark reality of a postcolonial cityscape has the tendency to desensitize the common person, while their day-to-day existence is mired in their own self as a desiring machine caught in assemblages that repress and deny continuously. "Desire becomes that only because it is repressed, it takes that mask on under the reign of the repression that models the mask for it and plasters it on its face. . . . If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society."⁷⁸ As social systems fail to address these inequalities and create further chasms within societies, societies evolve into cancerous assemblages.

Conclusion












Microfascism, in the urban spaces of Mumbai, exhibits itself in acts of seemingly innocuous nature, especially in the context of control societies. Such acts of repression within a cancerous body without organs generate desires that challenge the existence of smooth spaces and nomadic social imagination. Microfascist patterns of social behavior create identities which reaffirm signifying systems that perpetuate control societies. The compliance that the people who populate public urban spaces like Mumbai exhibit to microfascism clearly demonstrates the deep-seated desire for repression at the molecular level in contemporary Indian society. Neoliberal values that provide the ideal framework for inculcating and normalizing such thought patterns are visible in Mumbai's public spaces, be it in the malls and other "junk" spaces, or the residential areas that discriminate and marginalize the Other. The ubiquitous presence of microfascism in public urban spaces like Mumbai exposes the self-destructive assemblages at work, through the bodies of the citizens as well as through the socio-political, economic, and cultural discourses that define the nation. A homogeneity is emphasized and this demands the obliteration of other voices, of protests, and of any resistance that is polyphonic and plural in nature. Control is ambivalent and polymorphous in these microfascist structures. Yet, even as assemblages of fascist powers shape the urban spatial identities, we witness forms of everyday resistance and subversive acts of dissent evolving out of the microfascist spaces of contemporary India, adopting innovative methods that grow out of the community.

Notes

1. Thomas Nail, "Biopower and Control," in *Between Deleuze and Foucault*, eds. Nicolae Morar, Thomas Nail and Daniel W Smith, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 254 [↗](#)
2. Ibid., 252. [↗](#)
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